

Historic Bill will Provide Advanced Appropriations for the VA

Washington, D.C. – Legislation co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-Dover) that will provide advanced appropriations for veterans' health care for the first time in history is on its way to being signed into law by President Obama. H.R. 1016, the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act, provides funding one year in advance for veterans medical programs. The legislation, which Congressman Hall is an original co-sponsor of, passed the House in July. Yesterday, the Senate passed a final version of the legislation. Historically, funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been late in reaching its many critical programs.

"The budget for the VA has been passed late for nineteen of the last twenty years," said Hall. "This is an unacceptable situation that has forced the VA to ration healthcare to veterans. By passing advanced appropriations for veterans' health care, Congress is ensuring that budget delays will not allow the quality care veterans deserve to be compromised."

H.R. 1016 would authorize Congress to approve the VA's medical care appropriations one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year. An advance appropriation would provide the VA with up to one year in which to plan how to deliver the most efficient and effective care to an increasing number of veterans with increasingly complex medical conditions.

Additionally, the VA will be required to detail estimates in the budget documents it submits annually to Congress. Each July, the VA will be required to report to Congress if it has the resources it needs for the upcoming fiscal year in order for Congress to address any funding imbalances. This will help to safeguard against the VA facing budget shortfalls such as it faced just a few years ago.

Reform of the method in which the VA health care system is funded has been the top legislative priority for many veteran service organizations this year. In a letter sent by eleven veteran service organizations to Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, a vote for H.R. 1016 "will be among the most important for veterans and their families that the Committee will take this year."

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